

The Spoonbill

A Publication of the Ornithology Group (OG)
of the Houston Outdoor Nature Club

October 2011
Vol. 60 No. 8

Monthly Meeting: Monday October 3

**Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnett, Houston**

Learning Corner -- 6:30 p.m.

General Meeting -- 7:00 p.m.

EVENING PROGRAM:

**GARDENING FOR BIRDS
SPEAKER: GLENN OLSEN**

October Field Trip

-- O G --

Saturday October 15

Galveston Island

&

Texas City Dike

ONE OF HOUSTON'S FINEST EDUCATORS SCHEDULED FOR OCTOBER EVENING PROGRAM

Glenn Olsen has had a passionate interest in nature since early childhood. In addition to bird identification, he has a special interest in the relationships of plants, birds, butterflies, and other insects. Glenn teaches Bird Identification and nature related classes at Rice University's Glasscock School of Continuing Studies and is an instructor for Audubon's birding classes. He served as state president and Houston Chapter president of the Native Plant Society of Texas. Glenn is a certified Texas Master Naturalist. He leads field trips and gives presentations at festivals such as Galveston FeatherFest and the Rockport/Fulton Hummingbird Festival among others. Glenn also leads professional birding and nature tours for groups and individuals with recent trips to Big Bend, Costa Rica, Ecuador, the Amazon Rain Forest and the Galapagos Islands.

Adam Wood Returns as Interim OG Field Trip Coordinator:

I am stepping back in as Field Trip Coordinator to help out this year, though I am still wanting to turn this position over to some fresh blood with new ideas. If there are any volunteers or if anybody that knows of a member that may not be on our listserve that would like to serve the OG in this capacity please let me know. I will be willing to work with the volunteer for a year if that will make this position seem less daunting. If you are serious about taking this position and have any questions please let me know. I hope everybody has had a good summer and has managed to stay relatively cool during the brutal summer. Now we can all look forward to fall and another fun OG year of field trips.

Adam

Schedule For OG Field Trips

Oct. 15:	Galveston Island and Texas City Dike
Nov. 19:	(TBD)
Dec. 15 - Jan 6	(Dates Not Official): Christmas Bird Counts
Jan. 21:	Brazos Bend State Park & Davis Estates (Bill Godley)
Jan 26-29:	NE Texas (Haggerman NWR, Lake Tawakoni, & White Rock Lake (TBD))
Feb. 18:	Lake Livingston and Huntsville State Park (TBD)
Mar. 17:	Fermosa Tejano Wetlands and Environs (TBD)
Apr. 21:	Sabine Woods and Environs (TBD)
Apr. 28- May 6:	Big Bend including Junction and South Llano (TBD)
May 19:	Katy Prairie (TBD)

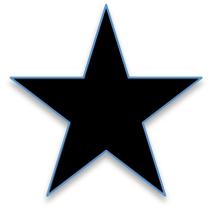
Visitors are always welcome on regular monthly field trips. You do not need to sign up for the monthly field trips just show up at the designated meeting location at the designated time ready to have a good time birding. Quarterly field trips are for members only.

Dates in Bold are Quarterly Field Trips

Adam announced at the September meeting that there will not be an October Quarterly Field Trip scheduled this year.



LET'S GET OUT IN OCTOBER



October 15th
Willow Waterhole Bird Count
Monthly Event
3rd Saturday

October 22nd
Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary
Focus: Bugs and Spiders
Annual Halloween Visitors Day

4th Annual Katy Prairie Bioblitz

On Saturday, October 22 amateur and professional naturalists will go out to the *Flat Out Wonderful* Katy Prairie. They will take to the field to observe and record as many living species of plants, birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, fish, and fungi as they can during a one day period. Previous Bioblitzes have yielded over 300 species of plants and animals!

This exciting day of citizen science will add to our understanding of the rich biodiversity of the Katy Prairie and will also highlight the need to conserve a sustainable part of this irreplaceable habitat. What a great opportunity to learn more about the life found on coastal prairie remnants, wooded creeks, prairie wetlands, and farms. No experience necessary.

Participants should plan to arrive 15 - 30 minutes before the start of their counting window in order to meet other team members and to pick up equipment and data sheets.

All BioBlitz teams (excluding the early morning bird group) will meet at the KPC Field Office for a brief orientation. The Early Morning Bird Team will meet at the Warren Ranch - Rock Hollow Creek Entrance.

Early Morning Bird Team counting window is 6:30 - 10:00 AM

Registration required. Please contact Jaime Gonzalez at 713.523.6135 or email jgonzalez@katyprairie.org for more information. www.katyprairie.org

This information is an excerpt of the information found on the Katy Prairie Conservancy web site. All OG members interested in participating should go to the website for it's very extensive coverage of this event! (glance further on the website for it's Nov./Dec. listings too)

Urban Birding Extravaganza: OG Field Trip Report by Pam Smolen

On 8/29 about 30 OG members enjoyed an Urban Birding Extravaganza. We viewed Purple Martins gathering to roost at the Fountains Shopping Center on 59 South. We had the opportunity to watch them drink and bathe in a pond near the roost site. FYI: Thousands of Purple Martins gather each evening in August to roost prior to their migration to South America.

We then learned a new route to Lakeview Elementary in Sugar Land where we counted 2000 swifts entering the chimney after sunset.

Despite the hot days, the evening was cool and pleasant. It is amazing to see thousands of martins and swifts in one evening - truly an Urban Birding Extravaganza!

Welcome Aboard Nina Rach:

Nina has volunteered to serve in one of the Vice-Chair positions on the Ornithology Board. The Vice-Chair is a vital position that helps arrange for the Learning Corner and for the informative mix of speakers who present programs at OG monthly meetings. Nina will be a wonderful addition as a second chairperson, being at the meetings to greet our speakers and help with the set up for the program.

We saw her in action during the wonderful September Birding in Idaho program and slide show by Steve Gross - keeping up with his talk to change the slides, many of which were stunning photo's from OG member John Old. The program certainly left us all looking forward to an opportunity to travel and bird the wonderful variety of habitats found in the beautiful country we viewed. Thank you Steve for your "inspiration to bird".

About the Ornithology Group

The Ornithology Group (OG) is a division of the Outdoor Nature Club (ONC), a non-profit organization dedicated to greater knowledge about the environment and wildlife of the Upper Texas Coast. The OG is a club of individuals interested in all aspects of birding, including bird identification, listing bird sightings, competing in birding events, and preserving bird habitat. Some members study bird behavior, biology, distribution and migration, while others just enjoy watching birds. The organization is designed to accommodate these diverse birding interests. Monthly meetings and field trips provide an opportunity to interact with and learn from experts in local and international birding.

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OG website: <http://www.ornithologygroup.org/>

ONC website: <http://www.outdoornatureclub.org/>

Yucatan Mexico Birding Adventure

Texas is so close to this wonderful Mexican birding state. I saw the 10 day trip listed in Roadsolar magazine and decided that they could provide me with a safe but exciting adventure into tropical birding. Once you pay for a Roadsolar trip, you are done putting out money except for your airline ticket. The Mexican guides were top notch and the tour company provided safe hotels and good food.

In January the temperatures are modest and only brief rain showers are likely. Male birds are courting and the U.S. migrants are still here. Magnolia warblers sit right next to euphonias. The birding group is always small, 10 people and two guides. I saw 174 species and half were new for my life list.

The plan was to experience 10 days in the Yucatan state, going from Merida to Palenque in Chiapas on the Guatemala border. The opportunity to see tropical birds in the settings of the great ruins of the Maya dynasty was appealing. Some of the restored cities, like Chichen Itza, were full of tourists but their landscaped hotel grounds are an early morning treasure of colorful birds. Outside the Mayaland Hotel I encountered Turquoise Browed Motmot, Chachalacas, Yucatan Jays and tropical Pygmy-owls. At dawn, parrots were noisily feeding in the trees and we peered into the brush for the Spotted Wren. The hummingbirds flit from flower to hedge but you have to be fast with the bins to see Carnevet's and Long Tailed Emeralds.

One of the day trips from Chichen Itza is to the salt flats at the Gulf of Campeche for shorebirds and Flamingos. A slow boat trip in the lagoons of the Bay would find for us Bare Throated Tiger Heron, Boat Billed Heron and many waders. These mangrove swamps produce the delicious white fish that we subsequently ate for lunch at the marina restaurant.

The Maya produced salt and traded it all over Mexico from the deposits mined here. Salty water allows the Flamingos to feed on the brine shrimp and winter on a barren, isolated coastline. There is a modern road that runs down the center of the Yucatan state. The less disturbed ruins are deep in the thorn forest. Sheltered birding under the giant Ceiba trees, produces a magical picture in your mind of what it was like to live in 1300 AD. A Bat Falcon was seen perched on a carved stela. The trip wrapped archaeology and ornithology into one package.

Driving the roads in Yucatan will put you in "hawk heaven". All those Rio Grande/Mexican species sit on the telephone poles and stare down at you. White tailed, Roadside, Black hawk, White hawk, Black Collared hawk and Laughing falcon are here. Woodpeckers were the favorites of our guide and I saw Linieated and Pale Billed, the two large Mexican species that remind me of the Pileated. Woodcreepers are fun too as they aren't the tiny little birds that we are used to seeing. For sheer color in green leaves, tanagers and orioles steal the show. There are so many varieties. Rufous Crowned Pepper Shrike is a mouthful and a special bird at roadside stops.

South of the important ruin of Palenque is the border with Guatemala and inspiring encounters with crocodiles and King Vultures. The trip highlight was the half day boat trip up the mighty Usumacinta river to the hidden temples at Yaxchilan. You will learn a lot about the Maya culture as you visit their present Yucatan villages and remember the isolated ruins of their history.

Some would ask, "why would you go to an unsafe part of the world"? Yucatan is not unsafe when you place in proper focus the standards for travel in a less developed region. Group travel with local guides subjects the traveler to the usual hazards that can happen to anyone such as "wrong place at the wrong time". The Mexican police were vigilant and courteous when our bus passed through inspection check points. More danger from the food and water than from the bad guys. If you yearn for new bird species, you have to venture out. Be sure you take all the precautions and let the guides show you a great time in Mexico.

JoAnn Raine

Migration in Late Fall: Don't Hang Up the Bins Yet

With fall well on its way the first wintering birds are arriving in Texas. Soon the loud chips of Yellow-rumped Warblers, which will accompany any outing throughout the winter, will be heard and the first sparrows will settle into brushy patches. Waterfowl are on the move, with flocks of early Blue-winged Teals already arriving, followed by Northern Shovelers and Pintails.

Large numbers of shorebirds have already crossed Texas on their southbound migration since July and numerous species of warblers, vireos, and flycatchers passed through the state during early and mid-September. While I am sure the majority of us are ready for winter and cooler temperatures, ready for skeins geese overhead, ducks on the lakes, and challenging gulls on the beaches, fall migration is not over yet. There are a few late migrants and stragglers that are worth looking for, especially since some species are much more common in fall than spring.

Compared to spring fallouts, which can bring a flood of migrants to the coast, fall migration is quieter and more drawn out. Warblers, including young of the year, trickle quietly through coastal woodlots and Houston's green spaces. In addition the luxurious growth of summer and smaller number of birds can make it difficult to locate these scattered migrants. It helps to listen carefully to feeding flocks or any bird activity. Warbler chips usually stand out among the usual calls of our resident chickadees, titmice, and cardinals.

Several warblers are more common along the Texas coast in fall than spring, these include Nashville, Canada, Mourning Warblers, and one of the better reasons to bird late in the fall, the Black-throated Blue Warbler. Even though this spring hosted several Black-throated Blue Warblers on the Texas coast, fall remains the best time of year to catch a glimpse of this species. Mainly migrating to the east of Texas, Black-throated Blues are frequently found in Texas from late September to mid-November. Fall may also be a great time to come across western warblers straying to the upper Texas coast.

While the number and diversity of warblers is lower in the fall, flycatchers are abundant compared to spring. September and even into October are prime months to sharpen identifications skills or get serious headaches as scores of Empidonax flycatchers move south. Alder, Least, and Yellow-bellied can all be common, but Willow Flycatchers are harder to find and tricky to identify.

All other migrants are also well represented with orioles, vireos, buntings and thrushes on the move and migrant sparrows following close behind. For sheer numbers the spectacle of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds is hard to beat.

Birds will often linger during fall, allowing birders to catch up with species missed during spring. With juveniles migrating for the first time, fall is also a great season for vagrants and rarities to show up anywhere in Texas. Here is a shortlist of rare birds that have been found on the Upper Texas coast, yes you guessed it during fall, Clark's Nutcracker, Gray Kingbird, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Connecticut Warbler, and several others. So keep on birding right into winter.

Stephan Lorenz

NEVER HANG UP THE BINS!

Make your travel plans for November instead. Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, in New Mexico, will be hosting this year's Festival of the Cranes November 15-20. Sandhill Cranes begin arriving in November and leave as late as the end of February. Bosque del Apache offers so much more than the cranes, it is known as one of the best birding spots in the state.

www.friendsofthebosque.org/crane

DINOSAURS' LIVING DESCENDENTS Coming to the October Spoonbill web version

A great photograph of a Pileated Woodpecker in action, feeding its young, was sent to me by our OG member Harlan Evans. Also sent to me by a reader is a cute Pileated story to make you smile. Harlan's photograph was taken at Brazos Bend State Park, but the appearance of this bird takes me back to an article I read in the Smithsonian Magazine on the feathered fossils that answer the question about the ancestors of today's birds. The article is a must read for all of us who are fascinated by birds. Take an Internet trip to the archives of the Smithsonian.com to find the December 2010 story: Dinosaurs' Living Descendants.

Via the Internet WeLoveBirds.org

I send out the Spoonbill and almost immediately begin to have this anxiety over blank pink pages. Where will the stories come from, what will folks find interesting, how can people be inspired in their bird watching? I started keeping a file folder for tidbits of promising sources to share, one of which I decided to check out during our stretch of 109° days.

I pulled out a page with: Birds of a Feather Flock Together (sounded promising to me) from The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the NRDC (sounded promising to me) announcing a social network for bird enthusiasts to share, post pictures and videos, ask questions, learn from leading ornithologists and help protect our natural bird habitat. Surely this would lead to an interesting site except for that "social" aspect - because I don't Facebook, never Twitter, haven't Blogged, and was even a late bloomer to email. Yet those blank pink pages were looming and gave me the courage to press on the enter key.

I went around peeking at the site, watched part of a very nice slide show of beautiful bird photos, and ended up punching the tab into the section on Birding Q & A. One of the "what is this bird?" photo's caught my eye. It had been posted on Aug 17th and readers had already come to a conclusion. The bird is a leucistic Brown Thrasher, a very interesting photo to view, as well as a subject recently touched on by the August OG speaker, Mark Bartosik.

leucistic *lu:'sɪstɪk*

adjective Zoology

(of an animal) having whitish fur, plumage, or skin due to a lack of pigment.

ORIGIN from **leuco-**'white' + the adjectival suffix *-istic* .

It reminded me of a set of pictures sent to Billie Strickland from a south Texas birder. With Billie's help and her Falfurreias connections I received permission for the Spoonbill to include two photographs of a beautiful Red-tailed Hawk with leucistic plumage in our October web newsletter.

Perhaps you'll want to peek at the WeLoveBirds web site to see the Thrasher photo or just keep alert in your own bird viewing observations for the unique in nature. Enjoy October everyone.

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